

Intro

What was your first memory? In general it is believed that real memories start to configure into something more stable and permanent by the age of four. By eight years old most people end up forgetting most of their memories from ages three and earlier.

It's something that people have studied in earnest, and even normal people have laughed about and asked in curiosity. I bet even now you're thinking hard on what your first memory could have been. Have you ever wondered why it was that memory, that memory in particular and nothing else, that cemented itself so fiercely and stubbornly into your brain? Most people never really know why they remember the most random things as their first memory. Sometimes it's funny things, sometimes it's a little disconcerting, such as remembering your first memory to be you talking to an imaginary friends and creeping yourself out. But mostly it's about that lose warm feeling of nostalgia, that small smile that curls your lips as you remember. But sometimes it's more than that, worse than it.

Sometimes your first memory is something derived in pain, in longing, in hatred.

Sometimes your first memory is the sharp contrast of your mother's embrace, holding onto your sharply as something white hot lashes at your back, flames trickling around you as if hopeful to caress your face and tug you away from your mother's embrace and into the angry flames, an embrace of which you might never (would never) awake from.

But usually first memories are something like throwing a rubber ball at a parents head or picking your nose and eating it. Life sure was strange that way. You just have to take what you get and run with it.

Chapter One

That morning proved to be quite a bit worse than all the other ones before it. It wasn't just because Iris, star champion (almost, if she keeps practicing) of the archery club was oversleeping, having stayed up too late the night before, or even because her sister had not been able to shut up about how excited she was that a certain someone was finally joining them in their high school, oh no. It was because her poor, poor, poor, alarm clock was having a hard time.

An alarm clock's life is but a simple one. It lives for one purpose, and one purpose only: To awaken their owners. That does not mean that that is all they have in life, however. Alarm clocks are known for being viciously competitive, and rank each other in their little communities of various types of alarms. The alarms that are the most consistent in waking up their owners are ranked above the others, and are thought to have gained special privileges once they retire to Alarm Heaven.

But back to her alarm clock's noble battle with the strong and merciless power of sleep. It wasn't going to give up easily, it just wasn't that type of clock. So, focusing all of its chakra, the alarm gathered up all of its energy via mental yoga and took a large, deep breath. And then promptly realized that it was not able to breath and went straight to emitting the highest pitched noise it could. After two consecutive minutes of wailing, it hesitatingly stopped and checked to see if its owner was awake.

She wasn't.

The alarm clock refused to give up! Once again it summoned all of its energy and slammed it outwards, its screech so loud that it vibrated on the night table it was situated on and landed, rather painfully, on Iris' head. She immediately woke up.

And thus ended the tale of the courageous alarm clock, may it one

day become another one of Iris' lazy daydreams.

But back to the start. Iris groaned as she sat up in bed, rubbing her sore head with a narrowed eyes look at the finally silent alarm clock. This wasn't really the best way to start the day, especially when it was the first day of the term. The olive skinned girl winced as she realized the implications of the first day of the term. She would have to see *him* again.

Nothing else quite filled her with dread the way seeing a dear, familiar, childhood friend. Actually, she wondered if friend was even the right word for this guy anymore. Iris knew her sister would certainly think of him in warm tones, but Iris preferred cool toned colours herself.

Speaking of her sister, Iris' bedroom door was slammed open almost viciously, her sister stepping through the door with a triumphant look. "Iris, why aren't you dressed yet?" Immediately her sister was talking, stepping around the clothes haphazardly tossed on Iris' floor to plop next to her sister on the bed.

"Good morning to you too," Iris replied sleepily, too tired and drowsy to even pretend to be saying anything witty. She wondered if Marigold would leave her be if she casually slipped back under the covers and stayed there for another hour...or three.

Evidentially not, as when the girl tried to hide under her blankets, Marigold just yanked back the covers with a huff. "There's no time to sleep!" She sounded almost personally offence that her younger sister (by three minutes, as Iris liked to remind everyone) wanted to just sleep away the day instead of having to trek the walk to their annoyingly stuffy private school.

"There's no time for school either!" She almost whined, but settled for the tiniest of scowls. It was probably more of a pout, but there was no one there who had time to point it out. "There's snow, it's cold, there's barely any green!"

Iris had an extreme fondness for nature, but only the nature that featured strong vibrant trees and sweet smelling grass. There was always a lingering feeling of nostalgia when she was among the wildflowers and wide fields of green. She guessed it was because their parents used to take them on nature hikes a lot.

Marigold was busy lecturing Iris, so as usual she ended up dazing off, staring at her sister's dress. It was bright blue, pleated and had pink seams. It was actually incredibly adorable, and matched her sister's curly blond hair, that was currently being tamed by two low hanging pig tails. Iris glanced a look at her own messy dark hair. It was too thin and long to be able to pull off anything that cute.

She was snapped out of her musing by Marigold shaking her shoulders lightly. "Just get dressed and come meet me downstairs, Eric promised he was going to walk us to school!" Her sister was beaming brightly, prettily. Iris felt like she was going to vomit.

But instead of spewing out something that unsavoury, she just stifled a yawn. "Okay, Mari. I'll be down in ten minutes." And, satisfied at last, her sister bounced off of the bed and bounded out of the door.

Now all there was to do was to force herself to get out of bed. Ugh. Iris groaned again, and then once more, as she slowly dragged herself out of her warm comfy bed. It was bad enough that it was a Monday, bad enough that she had to see Eric, bad enough that she had to get up at all for school, but now she would be late and not even have time for breakfast! Thanks a lot, alarm clock. Iris shot a moody look at the offending noise maker.

She turned to slide out of her pyjamas and into a sweater and skirt, effectively missing the gentle tear that rolled down the alarm clock's cheek. Where did it even cry from, no one knew. It was one of life's great mysteries for sure.

It wasn't even like she was wearing a skirt to capture Eric's

attention, no, it was far from it. Every other time that she had worn jeans while with him, he always made a point of complimenting her legs. It was creepy, and always made her skin crawl. It didn't help that Marigold would always pout when Eric complimented Iris, as if it was something to be envious of.

Iris slid on tights under the skirt, slipping on shoes and grabbing her school bag. She basically stomped down the stairs to the front door, something she knew that her mother would scold her for, if she were actually at home.

Marigold and Eric weren't by the door as Marigold had claimed they would be, so the teenager figured that she had a couple of minutes to herself before her sister opened the door to demand her to hurry up.

Not that Marigold was very fussy, or even bratty, she just had a weirdly short amount of impatience when it came to getting to school on time. Iris had thought that maybe she had someone she liked at their high school, but well, Eric. Eric pretty much ruined all of Marigold's relationships without even having to be there to even see it happen, or know that they existed. Needless to say, Iris wasn't very fond of him.

She didn't see why he had to transfer to their school, why he even had to move closer to them. They were already in grade twelve and she didn't see the point in it. He probably just wanted to get closer to Marigold. Iris couldn't forgive that. Her sister might be the older one, but Iris definitely took up the protective role.

Which was why she steeled herself and opened the door, gaze on the ground as she locked the door behind her and brushed her hair off of her shoulder. She hadn't even brushed it and yet it still wasn't knotted. The one good thing about her hair really. She narrowed her eyes as she saw Marigold and Eric standing a little too close to each other on the driveway. Marigold's hair was shining like spun straw in the sunlight, her cheeks rosy and her smile bright. Iris felt grateful to come from a family of attractive

people.

And then there was Eric. It looked as if he had grown even taller, his deep brown hair swept off of his forehead, his cheekbones high and, and. Iris' shoulders tensed up a little. Eric was very attractive and he knew it. He carried himself confidently, he had a smile that could make someone's knees weak, he even had a nice sounding voice. It was sickening, really.

Speaking of sickening, Eric must have heard the door close, because he turned his head, shooting Iris a perfectly warm smile. "Hello, Iris, it's been too long since I've seen you. You look as pretty as always."

Iris' cheeks coloured rudely, biting back a frown. "Thank you, Eric." She sounded a little stiff to her own ears, but she didn't bother trying to change her tone, instead just walking down to meet them and looping Marigold's arm with her own. She noticed that her twin looked a little down, but at least her smile was still there, even though it wasn't as bright as before. "We should go," she added quickly. "Marigold is looking too nice to be late to school." She wouldn't add that it was her fault that she was late, obviously.

Eric turned his attention to the older sister, opening his mouth and readying for what was probably a sleazy sounding compliment, but Iris cut him off with a forced smile, starting to walk with Marigold in tow. "We really need to hurry up." He blinked but laughed, agreeing and keeping up her pace, casually walking beside her. Iris felt a deep urge to bite into something hard and crunchy. Maybe his arm.

Nah, actually Marigold might get mad at her suddenly biting a "beloved childhood friend", but Iris figured she could swat him away from them one way or another. Biting didn't have to be completely off the table.

The entire (casually fast paced) walk to their school, Iris just let

the other two take up most of the conversation, keeping track only enough to make sure that Eric was paying more attention to Marigold than herself. It wasn't a giant mystery that Marigold had feelings for the boy, and Iris was firmly ready to support her, whether she approved of him or not. Of course that still didn't mean that she would make it easy for him. You got to fight for your meal, after all.

Just thinking about the word meal made her stomach growl quietly, thankfully going unheeded by the other two walking with her. She cast a longingly wistful look at a passing bakery. Missing the first half of school to eat as many pastries as she possibly could didn't seem like a bad idea...but she would have to be there for Marigold when Eric gets inevitably surrounded by girls.

She didn't understand the whole Eric hype. Sure he was attractive, but he acted really creepy and sleazy most of the time, although no one seemed to see that but her. No matter where they went, he always seemed to be popular. It wasn't even as if she was jealous; she could get popularity on her own, thank you very much. Iris didn't understand the clenching feeling she would feel when she saw Eric interacting with other people, especially when it was with her sister.

But this wanted the time to think about things like that. She just shrugged and pulled herself out of her thoughts just as they stepped onto school grounds.

Marigold checked her phone, a small frown tugging at her mouth. "We're not late, but we should get to our classes quickly!" She was trying to sound upbeat, but her face was clearly fallen. She probably just wanted to spend more time with Eric. Iris sighed.

She hoped that her sister would at least be able to find someone else. Even though they had just stepped on the grounds, male students were already casting glances at them. Well, she was pretty sure a good chunk of them were thinking once again about how strange it was that the flowery sisters didn't look anything

alike and were more like complete opposites, but still most of them would be checking them out. Not that Iris minded that much, it was just that romance wasn't exactly on the top of her to-do list. And it probably would never be.

She was more in love with nature itself than she'd ever be with a boy, and she was extremely certain of that. Something that certain wouldn't change, right? Right.

Probably anyways.

Either way they really did need to get a move on, so she just grabbed her sister's hand and started tugging her towards their classroom with barely a wave at Eric, who watched them go with a smile. It was creepy how he was always smiling. Smile, smile, smile, did he have any other expressions.

At least the rest of their day got to pass by safely enough, although Iris had to steer Marigold away from an Eric obsessed mob once or twice. It was annoyingly hard work, but her relief and happiness over getting to see her school friends again made it a little easier.

"I don't get why you just let her run into them," her friend Timothy had complained during lunch. She always had lunch with two of her closest friends in the area behind the school; it was one of the few times that she didn't stay stuck at her sister's side. "It's not as if she can't take care of herself, if she hasn't noticed that other people are interested in 'prince' Eric by now, there's something wrong with her." He took a bite of his sandwich during the sentence, spraying crumbs.

Iris had just shrugged, picking at the hem of her skirt. There wasn't a point trying to defend her weirdly uncomfortable feelings towards her sister and Eric being together, or her sister's feelings for him. Even the thought of Marigold interacting with some of his 'fans' (and God, were there already fans. Honestly, it was only the first day of the term.) made her want to cringe. Was it over protectiveness? Unease? ...Jealousy? She didn't like to focus over

it.

Timothy wouldn't let it rest though, continuing to speak over her silence. "You're sheltering her too much, isn't it best just to have her realize that he might like someone else and let her get over it instead of just dragging it on?" It was a pretty wise thing to hear from someone who had peanut butter smudged on his cheek.

Thankfully their other friend, Denise, threw her wrappers at the dark skinned boy before he could speak again, prompting a mini argument and allowing Iris to just flop back for the rest of the lunch hour. She almost wanted to ask her friend what he meant by Eric possibly having feelings for someone else, but she found that there was suddenly a frog in her throat.

The day passed by too quickly, and suddenly she was packing her bag at the end of the day, thinking over what Timothy had said. What if that really was the right choice? What if she really was just sheltering Marigold? She caught a strand of hair in between her lips, continuing to wonder even as she mechanically zipped up her bag. Iris almost didn't notice when someone tapped on her shoulder.

Eric's bright smile greeted her as she looked over her shoulder. She immediately had to suppress an annoyed groan, shifting to turn and face him.

That proved to be a bad idea. Eric just moved even closer to her, hands on the desk on either side of her. As glad as she was that Marigold wasn't here to see her sorry excuse of a crush sidle up to her sister, or that there was basically no one left in the near empty classroom, save for a sniffly guy who was blowing his nose in tissues, to see what was definitely about to become a train wreck, Iris wasn't too pleased with being alone with Eric once more.

"What do you want?" It came off as harsh, her words skittering against the empty classroom. The sick guy looked up, confused, but was soon overtaken by a gross sounding sneeze. Iris blew air

out in frustration.

The boy in front of her shrugged casually, taking a hand off of the desk to run his fingers through his hair. "Do you remember what I asked you last summer when I came to visit?"

Her breath caught in her throat. How could she forget?

Last summer was one of the most complicated summer breaks she had ever had. It started with her parents doting on Marigold, as usual, and leaving her to sit in the empty house alone, also as usual. Iris liked to pretend to be mature enough not to feel excluded and lonely, but that really wasn't the case. Their dad took Marigold horse riding, their mom helped her shop for clothing and had giggled with her over boys and clothes and everything else.

Iris had felt like her summer would go down the same lonely tinged route that most of her recent summers had been going for some reason. She knew that she was just being paranoid, but it was really starting to feel like her parents were withdrawing from her and spending more time with her older sister. But Iris knew that even if they were spending more time with Marigold, it was probably just because they knew that Iris was more than capable of taking care of herself. That didn't stop her from feeling lonely though. She didn't even have Timothy and Denise to hang out with, the two opting to spend time with their family in various countries.

Iris selfishly didn't think that it was fair.

It seemed like her summer would just be a tangled mess of her vying for her parents attention while struggling not to feel bitter towards Marigold, when he showed up.

For almost a whole minute, from the moment that Eric had shown up on the doorstep, smile on his face and hair windswept as usual, Iris felt grateful. And then he opened his mouth, and his usual

brand of distasteful flirting dripped out. But even that wasn't enough to deter her from using him to shove away her loneliness. It's not even like she responded to his blatant and empty flirting; she rejected him as always. But suddenly they were spending time together, desperately trying to feel like she had someone in this world. They'd talk and play games, and Iris felt like he was really starting to see her as a proper friend, and it made her heart feel like it was soaring.

Of course, it didn't make Marigold happy at all. It was as if life was flipped upside down; suddenly *Iris* was the one getting the attention and Marigold was the one feeling shunted to the side. It wasn't Iris' intention, but she'd be lying if she said that it didn't make her a little selfishly pleased.

It was like she had suddenly gained another friend, a confidant. She had even told Eric about her insecurities with her parents, how she felt like her family was constantly picking Marigold over her. He had let her cry on his shoulder, and Iris started to consider him a good friend. It really seemed like he understood that she was jealous and bitter, but that she still cared for Marigold and her parents very much.

But then Eric brought up the topic of revenge.

They were star gazing, as they usually did during the warm summer nights, Iris casually rejecting his half hearted advances, and Eric grinning and moving on to talk about some pretty girl he saw during the day. He had propped himself up on his elbow, and without any further preamble, asked her out.

Iris thought he was just being an ass again and rolled her eyes, moving the topic on, but he had reached down and enclosed his fingers around her arm. "Date me," he had repeated, mouth drawn into a surprisingly serious line. "I like you, why don't you go out with me?"

She had grown flustered, jerking back from the hand on her arm. There were a million different reasons why she couldn't, wouldn't,

date him, and only a few reasons why she wanted to. It was too fast, she didn't even think that she liked him that way, even though she was grasping for a link like this, she didn't know how to put it into words, how to make him understand.

Without thinking, she blurted out one word, probably the one word that would ever stop Eric in his tracks, "Marigold."

It really wasn't a big secret that Marigold was heads over heels for Eric. They both knew that he couldn't deny that he knew that she had feelings for him, whether he liked it or not. The older girl was so sensitive, so sweet, finding out that the love of her life was asking out her twin sister would just shatter her, and Iris wasn't willing to do that, not for a relationship that she wasn't even sure about.

That just spurred an argument though, Eric shouting at her not to put Marigold before her own feelings, Iris yelling that he was too impulsive, did he even really like her?

The summer ended on a bitter note for both of them, Eric leaving without so much as a goodbye and Iris pretending that nothing had ever happened. Marigold seemed guiltily pleased that the two were apparently at odds, but Iris couldn't blame her for that. If her sister ever found out what they had fought about, she would be devastated.

And then she got the news that Eric was transferring to their school after winter break. Even though it had been months since it happened, Iris was still uneasy and annoyed around him. At least it had almost felt like things had gone back to normal, like how it was before that summer.

Of course Eric would try to ruin things by bringing up that summer.

He was still waiting for her response, fingers still combing through his hair in a more nervous fashion than before. The other nameless guy in the room slid tissues from the box, miserably

blowing his nose.

Iris swallowed thickly, looking away from him. "Yeah, I remember summer. Do you mind moving back? I need to go meet Marigold." She tried to sound distant and nonchalant, but her voice trembled a little. She really hoped he wasn't about to cause a scene at school of all places.

He grabbed her arm, and she groaned. "Iris.." He moved closer, his free hand moving to her hair. She jerked back, and he gave her a wounded look, but carried on. "I'm sorry I said all those things, but I really do like you. I've always liked you. It's..it's always been you for me." Eric looked at her so earnestly that a pang of guilt went through her heart.

"I, I can't. Eric I already told you that I can't date you.." She glanced around quickly, grateful that the other person was pointedly not looking in their direction. This was mortifying. "Can't you just stop?" she pleaded. "I can't hurt Marigold, not like this."

Eric scowled. "I don't *care* about what Marigold thinks about us!" His voice echoed through the room, making Iris cringe. "What does she matter? Why doesn't what we want matter?" He demanded. "We should be able to date if we want to!"

She wanted to correct him and say that it was only just what he wanted, that she didn't want to date, but she found herself unable to speak.

"Tell me what you said was a lie." A soft voice said. For a moment Iris thought that it was herself that had spoke, blinking and touching her mouth. But Eric was staring at something behind her, something in the doorway, and suddenly Iris didn't want to turn around.

Marigold stepped into the room.

